

Report
of the
Socialist Women
of
Greater New York
to the
International Socialist
Congress
Copenhagen, Denmark
August 28th---September 4th, 1910

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Greetings :

The phenomenon everywhere resulting from modern industrial evolution, viz., the female invasion of industry, is at the present stage, perhaps, more of a factor in the United States than in any other country. During the last quarter of a century it may almost be said that the entire female proletariat has developed to be at one time or another part of the great industrial army. This has gradually given rise to new and complicated conditions in the already complicated condition of the American Labor Movement.

The first visible result upon the social-political field of this female invasion of industry was a loud and strenuous campaign of antagonism between the two sexes. This clamor was led by the great capitalist papers, journals and magazines which are ever alert for an issue that divides the proletariat. An active campaign of sex-antagonism was also carried on by most of the unions of the American Federation of Labor that loudly clamored against female competition wherever it tended to lower the wages of its

membership. So even upon this field the American Federation of Labor proved itself a job-protecting concern of a certain class of wagedworkers, and was ready to serve in promoting capitalist prejudices among the workers. The confusion thus created in labor's ranks was further accentuated by the clamoring of the pure feminists, the "women advocates" and the "suffragists." But in spite of noise, clamor and confusion social and industrial evolution went its course and to-day the female industrial wage-slave will have to be reckoned with by the genuine American Labor Movement.

In the meantime a number of women were attracted to the socialist movement. These ignored the feminist clamor and took their stand with the male comrades in the sections and educational bodies of the Socialist Labor Party.

No special "woman activity" took place, however, until in 1905. By this time the women of the Socialist Labor Party, particularly in Greater New York, commenced to realize that some special effort would be necessary in order to reach the vast army of women wage-earners. So the organization known as "The Socialist Women of Greater New York" was organized with the aim of reaching and educating the women proletarians in this city and gradually to extend their activities to all parts of the country. Subsequent events have proven that their theory was correct, and that it was none too soon acted upon.

The first thought of the "Socialist Women" was to produce a literature of its own, sound in Socialist principles

but treating the subject mainly from a woman's point of view and designed to attract and interest the women wagedworkers, for the purpose of instituting among them an extensive and systematic campaign of education.

A splendid edition of Bebel's "Woman Under Socialism" translated by Daniel De Leon, Editor of The People, had been issued by the Labor News Company. This, along with Engels' "Origin of the Family" and other classics sufficed for study and education upon the subject. The problem that confronted us, however, was to create a literature with which to reach the masses.

Consequently, in 1907, a call was issued and a prize (\$100) offered for an essay on "Woman" from a Socialist point of view. The object was to secure one or more good agitational pamphlets. The contest was made international within the English speaking world, and it was particularly stipulated that the essay should be non-partisan, i. e., it should advocate no particular political party or economic union. As judges in this contest we selected the well-known woman writer Mrs. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, W. J. Ghent, then Secretary of the Rand "School of Social Science," and Frank Bohn, then the National Secretary of the Socialist Labor Party. We flattered ourselves that we had secured a representative committee fully capable of judging the subject and looked forward to great results. But now came a surprise that taught us exactly the status of the woman movement in the English speaking world, and what a great necessity there indeed exists for sound proletarian education.

We had expected that a number of proletarian women would answer this call from proletarians. We were disappointed. The response came mainly from women of the several categories of the bourgeoisie and reflected their various confused notions upon the subject. Some excellent essays, however, were received. But now came the greatest surprise of all. The committee of which we had expected such splendid judgment, awarded in its first decision the prize to a half single tax, half government ownership and wholly feminist abortion. This decision taught us a valuable lesson, as to the caliber of those who in their self-conceit pose as the teachers of the American proletariat. When our "leading lights" know no better than this, small is the wonder that the movement is in an incipient stage, and that the workers are divided against themselves! This award, however, called forth a vigorous protest from the "Socialist Women." A new award was positively demanded, if the committee was not to be ingloriously set aside. The prize was finally, after some pressure on our part, awarded to a clear scientific Socialist essay, "Woman and Her Emancipation," written by Comrade John H. Halls, of London, England. This has subsequently been issued in pamphlet form. Another excellent essay from this contest, "Woman and the Socialist Movement," by Olive M. Johnson, was also chosen by us for publication. This, though written by a member of the S. L. P., is entirely non-partisan and has been adopted by many locals of the Socialist Party for agitation among women. It has subsequently been translated into Russian, Jewish, German and

Swedish. Thus started our first wide propaganda and thus did we learn the tremendous proportions of the ignorance and prejudices we have to battle against.

The "Socialist Women of Greater New York" have carried on a systematic propaganda of education in the shape of discussion meetings, lectures, open-air meetings, distribution of literature at meetings, upon the streets and at factory doors. Thousands of women have already received our message. In the great Moyer, Haywood and Pettibone demonstrations in 1906, the "Socialist Women" for the first time in America came forward and partook in a great public demonstration, and presented the startling spectacle of organized class-conscious women side by side with their proletarian brethren protesting against the outrages of Capitalism.

The Socialist Women of Greater New York, though mainly composed of S. L. P. women, were holding themselves neutral and were doing everything to avoid any rooted prejudices and were ever working for and favoring the unification of the American proletariat from the suicidal policy of division that now prevails. Therefore, when, in 1907, the international proletariat practically received the mandate from the International Congress to attempt above all things to secure unity between the Socialist forces in the various countries, the "Socialist Women of Greater New York" instituted an active and aggressive "unity propaganda" through lectures, literature and addresses. We also issued in pamphlet form and extensively distributed an address upon "The Unity Question" delivered by Comrade Daniel De Leon, member of the International

illages for All" before the dazzled eyes of the guileless, unclassconscious, uninformed American woman wage slave. The danger concealed in this "issue" was clearly, though unintentionally emphasized by Mrs. Pankhurst, of England, in her farewell address at Cooper Union, December, 1909. She said: "There is one great advantage accomplished by the Woman Suffrage Movement. It has fastened the bond of sisterhood among all women as a sex, irrespective of class or station in life." This campaign of sham equality has made us more than wary as to the suffrage issue. It appears as if it might be the fond hope of our crafty capitalist ladies when they no longer can fool and cajole the American male proletariat, to dump upon the political arena the great army of women voters, duped by the notion of "equality and sisterhood of all women" and thus offset the effect of a class-conscious male vote. But if such is their hope they will indeed find it a chimera. Sound Socialist education will henceforth be carried on with untiring efforts among the female proletariat. But it behooves us to keep levelheaded upon this subject, the more so because the women of the S. P. are inclined to be women suffragists first, Socialists afterwards; and even go so far as to accuse us of being "anti-suffragists" because we lay more stress upon the *industrial emancipation of the proletariat* than upon the *political emancipation of women*.

In order to make clear our position on woman suffrage relative to the class struggle of the proletariat, we arranged a great public mass meeting at Cooper Union, May, 1909,

and invited Comrade Daniel De Leon to address the same upon the subject of "Woman Suffrage." This address fixes upon the woman movement in its proper place in the struggle of the race and in the class struggle of the proletariat; it exposes the follies of both the pro and anti-suffragists; in short, it furnishes us with a classic upon this much-disputed subject. It has been printed in pamphlet form and has already found an extensive circulation.

Significant is the fact that the American Federation of Labor is the center to which gravitate all the bourgeois instincts of the apologists of capitalism, from the lowest to the highest. And well they may in their instinctive dread of the social revolution seek shelter and safety with that kind of labor union which the highest organ of capitalism (The Wall Street Journal) has termed the strongest bulwark against Socialism in this country. The A. F. of L. openly advocates the harmony between Capital and Labor. The Socialist Party is endeavoring to perpetuate the A. F. of L. and to coax the workers into the co-operative commonwealth on the sly. The women of the S. P. cater openly to the suffrage movement that is endeavoring to "fasten the bond of sisterhood" between the women of the exploiting and the exploited classes. The results of such contradictory and confusing tactics cannot fail to be quick in asserting themselves. The "Socialist Women" have already had to grapple with their results.

In the latter part of 1909 a great strike broke out among the shirt waist makers in New York. The strike took large proportions and spread to other cities. The shocking conditions under which these women toilers labored

became widely exposed as a result of the strike. Sentiment (cheap enough at all times) ran high. With the very outbreak of the strike the "Socialist Women" took their post of duty. A number of meetings were held among the strikers, literature on the subjects of Socialism and class-conscious labor organization was constantly distributed, a committee of two was almost constantly in attendance at Clinton Hall, speaking to the girls, enlightening them on their class-interests, and pointing out the proper form of unionism prerequisite for their emancipation. The women of the S. P. were also active; but what was the aim, object and final result of their activity?

The workingclass spirit of the girls ran high for a time. Here, obviously, was a case for the so-called "bond of sisterhood of all women." It was not long in asserting itself. The women suffragists, headed by Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, of millionaire mining and railroad connections, and Miss Anne Morgan, daughter of the steel, railroad and money king, came forward as the "champions of the downtrodden sewing girls." The striking shirt waist workers were led to the Hippodrome, New York's largest auditorium, paid for by Mrs. Belmont, and were slobered over with sympathy and the sentimental gush of bourgeois idealism and nonsense about the "equality of plutocracy and proletariat." It was the fashion in those days with New York society belles to be furious in their sympathy for the girl strikers; and it became the duty of young dandies when passing out and in at their resorts in company with their dames to buy papers from the girls,

who sold them for the benefit of the strike fund, and pay for them with silver coins. Thus the dazzled and astonished girls suddenly found themselves the center of attention and popularity, and the fine silken cord that ties "the bond of sisterhood" soon strangled their brave maiden efforts for freedom. "The Women's Trade Union League," the female arm of the A. F. of L., and thitherto a dormant and inactive arm, it must be admitted, suddenly roused itself into action, and reached forward to draw the unsuspecting girls into its slimy grasp. Eva MacDonald Valesh, long known by those who had paid attention to her movements as a clever female lieutenant of Gompers, Mitchell et al., arrived upon the scene, and took charge of the situation. By this time the socialist agitation had its effect among the girls and had become decidedly obnoxious to the bourgeois society "sisters." Anne Morgan stamped her foot (in the newspapers) and said that the socialist agitation had to cease! Eva MacDonald Valesh wept bitter tears (also in the newspapers) and protested that no socialist agitation be tolerated. She emphatically sat down upon and completely cowed the S. P. women. What these did and how they fared is officially set forth in a document signed by leading members of the S. P. Women's Committee and printed in the S. P. New York Call of February 8th, 1910:

"There has perhaps never been a more humiliating position in the history of the labor movement than that occupied by the Socialist women in the shirtwaist makers' strike. So long as they did the work of the black man (Friday) they were tolerated and permitted to go on;

but no sooner did they attempt to do anything that would count officially than they were put in the background."

This, of course, only records the chagrin of having been pushed aside, but the document hastens to assure us how utterly uncalled for are ever the apprehensions that the S. P. would sin against the interests of the A. F. of L.:

"The other groundless accusation—that the Socialist women did nothing but preach Socialist doctrines—proves once more that Mrs. Valesh had never taken the trouble to visit any shop meetings during the strike. For the entire duration of the struggle the Socialists had confined themselves to purely trade union speeches, with the result that they did more than help the girls win the strike; they helped them to realize and learn that their only salvation from the merciless conditions is a well-organized union, for which the girls will stand now all the time, in and out of strike."

The shirtwaist makers' strike furnishes another chapter in the history of the humiliating role of the black man "Friday" played by the S. P.; it has again demonstrated the work of the A. F. of L. as the *bulwark of Capitalism* and as a lightning rod which leads into the ground the revolutionary electricity generated within the ranks of the proletariat; it has luminously illustrated the mission of the "sisterhood" advocated by the women suffragists; and it pointed plainly to the fact that one spreading of sound socialist propaganda necessitated and brought into being the female arm of the Civic Federation under which Eva MacDonald Valesh now holds a salaried position.

"The Socialist Women" did not flinch from their posi-

tion as long as the strike lasted. We continued our campaign of education regardless of the anger of the society women or the protests of the A. F. of L. Unlike our sisters of the S. P., we do not plead "not guilty" when accused of having preached Socialism.

We are proud of the fact and promise Miss Anne Morgan and Mr. Samuel Gompers and all their hirelings and satellites to repeat the offense early and often.

In spite of all the confusion that is fostered upon it, socialism—sound, scientific socialism—is still and increasingly so, the nightmare of the American Plutocracy.

In conclusion, if asked What is the matter with the labor movement in America that it appears to shatter itself everlastingly to pieces? we should answer that it woefully lacks class-consciousness and the spirit of sound class organization. There is in this country no lack of sympathy for the cause, no lack of sentiment for the downtrodden, no lack of rebelliousness against existing conditions among the workers themselves. But these feelings are all evaporated. Therefore sound education, agitation and organization must be the slogan of the future if the American movement is to crystalize into a movement capable of revolutionary action.

In keeping with this our knowledge and experience the "Socialist Women of Greater New York" determines to the full extent of its capacity to continue its mission, viz., to bring the American female proletariat abreast of the International Socialist Movement.

ANNA B. TOUTOFF.

Delegate to the International Congress from the "Socialist Women of Greater New York."